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Lewis and Dorothy Allen  
BOOK PRINTING WITH THE HANDPRESS

An Interview Conducted by  
Ruth Teiser

Berkeley  
1968





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## Lewis Mayhew Allen

Lewis Mayhew Allen, a leading figure in California fine book design for several decades, died January 13 in Greenbrae, after a stroke. He was 89.

Mr. Allen was born in San Francisco. His father, Harris S. Allen, was a publisher and the founder of Allen's Press Clipping Bureau.

Mr. Allen acquired a love for

fine printing from his father. He graduated from Lowell High School and, in 1930, from the University of California at Berkeley, where he majored in economics. He earned a master's degree in business administration from Harvard University in 1932.

He worked in his father's clipping business until 1951 but had already begun printing fine books in 1939, with his wife, Dorothy, at The Allen Press.

Their volumes were hand-set and hand-printed. They issued many books in California, as well as at Cagnes-sur-Mer and Antibes in France.

In 1953, The Chronicle praised their "remarkably fine" Christmas

edition of "The Hidden Treasure," by Balzac, with illustrations by the outstanding California artist Mallette Dean.

Mr. Allen's "Printing with the Handpress" was printed at his press and then republished by the Van Nostrand Reinhold Co. of New York in 1970. A Chronicle review described the Allens as "the only people today . . . who make handpress printing a full-time profession."

He was a longtime member of the Book Club of California.

He is survived by his wife, of Greenbrae, and his son, Stephen of San Jose.

No service will be held.

— Stephen Schwartz





Lewis and Dorothy Allen  
The Allen Press  
Kentfield - 1964



Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area

Interviews Completed by June, 1969

Lewis and Dorothy Allen, *Book Printing with The Handpress*

Brother Antoninus *Brother Antoninus: Poet, Printer, and Religious*

Edwin Grabhorn *Recollections of the Grabhorn Press*

Jane Grabhorn *The Colt Press*

Robert Grabhorn *Fine Printing and the Grabhorn Press*

Warren R. Howell *Two San Francisco Bookmen*

Haywood Hunt *Recollections of San Francisco Printers*

Lawton Kennedy *A Life In Printing*

Oscar Lewis *Literary San Francisco*

Bernhard Schmidt, Herman Diedrichs, Max Schmidt, Jr. *The Schmidt Lithograph Company, Vol. I*

Lorenz Schmidt, Ernest Wuthman, Steward Norris, *The Schmidt Lithograph Company, Vol. II*

Albert Sperisen *San Francisco Printers, 1925-1965*

Edward DeWitt Taylor, supplement to interview with Francis Farquhar

Adrian Wilson *Printing and Book Designing*





## INTRODUCTION

Lewis and Dorothy Allen are distinguished not only for their fine printing in itself but also for the fact that they hold a unique position: they are apparently the only professional book printers in the world who do all their work on the handpress.

While their headquarters have been the San Francisco Bay Area, they have also studied and printed in France. Their work takes much from the French *edition de luxe* as well as the books of such British and American printers as William Morris, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, C. H. St. John Hornby, Bruce Rogers and Edwin and Robert Grabhorn.

Mr. and Mrs. Allen were both born in May 1908, on the 13th and 25th respectively. They met while students at the University of California and married in 1932. Dorothy Caswell Allen, who had studied education, for some years taught in grammar and nursery schools. Lewis Allen, after college, worked in the press clipping bureau established by his father, at first relegating printing to avocational status.

In 1940 the Allens' first book was completed. By 1947 both were devoting four days a week to printing, Mr. Allen having reduced his office work to three days a week. Finally in 1951 he stopped it entirely and book printing became his sole, full-time occupation.



A descriptive check-list of the thirty-four books the Allens have printed since 1940 is appended to this interview. The final item on the list, *Printing with the Handpress*, is being completed as this introduction is being written. Although the Allen Press does not ordinarily submit its books for awards, many have been included in American Institute of Graphic Arts and Rounce & Coffin Club annual exhibitions.

The interview took place on April 24, 1968, at the Allens' home in Kentfield, a home pleasantly dominated by printing equipment and books of their own and others' production. Both Mr. and Mrs. Allen are somewhat reticent speakers but became less so as their thoughts were increasingly dominated by their enthusiasm for their work. By the end of the interview, however, although a second session was suggested by the interviewer, they felt they had said what seemed important.

The transcript was edited to some extent by the interviewer, who deleted some repetitious and incomplete sentences and changed the order of several paragraphs so that they appear here adjacent to related matter. Mr. and Mrs. Allen then made a number of changes in wording but none in general meaning, and added some specific information. Returning the typescript to the interviewer, Mr. Allen wrote, "To make our



approach more complete, we are including the first draft of the Introduction of the book I'm writing on the handpress." It also appears appended to this interview.

Ruth Teiser  
Interviewer

2 June 1969  
Regional Oral History Office  
Room 486, The Bancroft Library  
University of California  
Berkeley, California



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ENTERING THE FIELD OF HANDPRESS PRINTING

L. Allen: I guess the main point of our work is that, although in the beginning we used a power press to print our books, we gradually moved away from that into the hand printing field. It seems to give us what we were after. So, for the last ten years approximately we have done nothing but work on the handpress. And, of course, books are our main product.

It all began when I was about fourteen years old. My father\* was in the newspaper business in San Francisco and published a daily business newspaper (the San Francisco News Bureau) back in the 'nineties and up to the war [World War I]. Also he ran a job printing shop on the side. One time, when I was about fourteen, he replaced one of his jobbing presses with a newer model, and gave this press to me along with some type. We set it up in the basement of a neighbor's. That is how I became interested in printing.

Then, of course, when I went away to college, I did give it up. Shortly after we were married,

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\*Harris Stearns Allen



L. Allen: in 1932, I found a small press and began working on that. At the time we were living about one block from Jackson Burke. He was giving a course in handpress printing in his home.

Teiser: That was his Russian Hill home in San Francisco?

L. Allen: Yes. At the time we lived on Larkin Street. I went down there often and became interested in that type of printing. Although we did continue to produce books with a motor-driven press for some years, about 1950 we moved to a small house in Belvedere and there wasn't room for a motor-driven press. Jackson Burke had another handpress, a Reliance, which he lent to us then. We set it up in the master-bedroom and slept in the living room.

D. Allen: It was prettier there, anyway. The view was better.  
[Laughter]

L. Allen: So we began our first book on a handpress. From that point on we began printing more and more editions that way. A year later we went to France for a year, rented a house on the French Riviera, bought a small handpress in Paris, set it up in our house and printed a book--published by the Book Club of California.

Teiser: The Stevenson?



L. Allen: Yes.\* And at the same time we spent a good deal of time at the Bibliotheque [Nationale] studying the work of the fine French printers. And I think we're rather strongly influenced by them. Then eventually we came back here to Marin County, acquired another home and set up our presses there.

D. Allen: So it goes, on and on.

L. Allen: That is about it. We've been influenced not only by the French fine printers, but also by various presses in England during the "Revival" period, such as the Kelmscott, Doves and Ashendene. And of course, Bruce Rogers and the Grabhorns. I think those were our main influences.

Teiser: In that order, I presume?

L. Allen: Yes, yes, sort of chronologically. [Laughter]

D. Allen: As one grows to know the products of the fine presses, the more interesting it becomes, naturally. One becomes influenced unconsciously. But we evolved our own style though. Actually our work evolved from knowing all the other fine presses and getting to some point of our own; an individuality of our own, we hope.

Teiser: So I assume you have developed a way of printing, a style--can you call it a style?

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\* *La Porte de Maletroit*, 1952.



D. Allen: Not necessarily, but just the techniques of perfection. I'm speaking of Lewis. I'm not a printer. I'm the one who helps.

L. Allen: The modesty that depreciates self-achievement.

D. Allen: He's the printer, designer and all.

Teiser: Style probably is too strong a word because it implies a channeling, I suppose, a narrowness.

D. Allen: Yes.

Teiser: But even I, I think, can tell your printing when I see it.

D. Allen: A lot of that has become so, because we print with damped paper. And I think, possibly, Lewis is so meticulous, a perfectionist, that it does show, you know.

L. Allen: It shows in my gray hair. [Laughter] Anyway, I think that we did learn that we enjoy using our hands, and to produce our books entirely by hand was a certain satisfaction. Also, no one else seemed to be doing it at this time. No one else is, except very occasionally. And I guess we are the only ones now, in the world, who are working at it full time as a regular vocation.

Teiser: Did it start as an avocation with you?

L. Allen: Yes, very definitely. Then I began working only part time three days a week at my regular vocation. Then, after about three years of that, I stopped





L. Allen: completely to devote full time to printing, in 1951.

Teiser: What was your regular job?

L. Allen: It was one of these press clipping bureaus, Allen's Press Clipping Bureau. So we gave that up.

Teiser: Did you yourself establish Allen's Press Clipping Bureau?

L. Allen: No, that was my father.

Now, especially in these days of automation with everything motor-driven, producing books entirely by hand has become very necessary to us, very important to ourselves personally--part of our philosophy.

Teiser: As a creative expression?

L. Allen: Yes, in a way. Also, from the standpoint of method: the mind and the hand in an effort at creation. I think that combination is especially satisfying to people, and should be these days where it seems to be the exact opposite of the trend. Today, most people work in offices or factories, and are manipulated constantly by machinery. They are not as well adjusted to life as man could be. When they finish their jobs each day, they don't seem to have much to turn to. They don't get much satisfaction from their work when they're dealing with automatic machinery or doing routine work. I think



L. Allen: that something like the art and craft of handpress printing is satisfying.

Teiser: Do you work long hours?

D. Allen: Oh, yes, regular hours. Very much so.

Teiser: Am I interrupting your work?

D. Allen: No, not today. We've finished a book. And Lewis is writing a book now. We take a little time, sort of leisure, between books, to plan the next one.

Teiser: That is a creative part isn't it?

D. Allen: Oh, yes, that is, I think, to me the most exciting. . . The actual labor of printing the book, and it is a labor--to actually print the book on the hand-press is strenuous. But planning and designing the book, choosing the colors, the ink, the paper, everything that goes into making the completed book is to me the most stimulating part. But then I don't have to set the type either, which I think is difficult.

L. Allen: I usually get into the shop at exactly eight, or a little before, every morning. We work until 12:30 and then take thirty minutes for lunch; then work from 1:00 until about 5:30 on the five days a week.

Teiser: My word!



D. Allen: You can't get things out unless you do have an established time schedule.

L. Allen: Because books that are handset and worked on the handpress do naturally take a great deal of time.

Teiser: Self-discipline is just what some incipiently fine printers have lacked, isn't it?

L. Allen: Yes, I think so. They are more likely to settle for ephemera products than books.

D. Allen: Actually, I think it is the self-discipline that makes it worthwhile in the end, because you set a goal for yourself and the way the book must look from the beginning to the end. And if it doesn't come out that way it isn't because you haven't tried. If you've been slipshod, anywhere along the line, it always shows.

L. Allen: I think there is room for others such as ourselves in the field who would like to learn to print by hand and become dedicated. Because there should be many more than just ourselves.

D. Allen: They haven't been exposed; we think they should be.

Teiser: I keep having to go into, because it's so much a part of the recent history of fine printing in this area, the economics of it. The economics of John Henry Nash were one thing. . .

L. Allen: [Laughter] Yes.



Teiser: Of Lawton Kennedy are still another. What would be, for someone now, the economics of doing fine hand work?

L. Allen: If a person produced two titles a year, which is possible, and which we have done if we haven't done some traveling, then I think a person could make for his labor, about \$10,000 a year, which is enough for most people. But, of course, it does take a long time to build up an audience for these books that you charge \$65 or \$85 a copy. It has taken us some years to build up a productive mailing list, and we sell almost all copies direct. Therefore we don't have to pay any middleman.

D. Allen: I can't see, however, that any printer who is really dedicated and makes up his mind to print only the more important texts, not too many copies, and is willing to take a few years to establish his reputation--there's no reason why he can't do very well.

Teiser: It's the few years to get established, I suppose, that is really hard.

D. Allen: Yes, that is the difficult thing.

Teiser: How would someone live?

L. Allen: They would need some outside income at the beginning, of course, in order to establish themselves.





D. Allen: That's why we think it's a wonderful thing for older men to take up as an avocation when they realize that they will be retiring. If they had begun to think in these terms years before, that is something they can do always and enjoy. It just leads to so many other fields. Not just the printing of the book. Just the reading beforehand is so interesting and would be stimulating for many people who maybe physically cannot get about a great deal as they get older; yet they can do this on small handpresses and do beautiful work.

L. Allen: Yes, in a recent issue of the *Saturday Review*, there was a long article by Norman Cousins about the fact that the work week is shorter and people are retiring at an earlier age, but they don't know what to do with their leisure time, this increased leisure. Something like this could really be ideal for those people, because inasmuch as a press is not motor driven, they could set it up in an apartment or in a mountain shack, or just about anywhere--on board a ship.

D. Allen: They don't have to print series of books. They can print small jewels, you know. Just a few, and it would be most satisfying. One can become quite enamoured.



MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES

Teiser: What of the materials procurement? Do you go to San Francisco, or do you order from special places by mail, or . . .?

L. Allen: Usually by mail because we buy most of our paper in Europe, either France, Italy, or England.

Teiser: Do you use all handmade paper?

L. Allen: Yes, we use handmade paper; sometimes mold-made which is produced sheet by sheet on a machine. But it's all-rag paper. Also, we buy the paper or the cloth for the binding in Europe, as well as the ink. French or German ink. Most of these things are simply not available in this country. I mean, the best are not available because everything we produce is for mass consumption and not of the top quality.

Teiser: Where do you get your small tools?

L. Allen: We get most of those locally, but there isn't much involved. About half of our type came from Europe and the other half was obtained here in this country. That is part of the fun too. When we're in Europe we go to the paper mills for example, and work out a special formula for our paper with them. And then they produce it just to our specifications, usually with our watermark in the paper. It does



L. Allen: make it more personal that way.

D. Allen: But for someone else they could write to these same mills and easily obtain something exciting to work with.

Teiser: A press, I presume is not so difficult to procure, but type is a matter of building up a collection, isn't it?

L. Allen: Yes, that is it. One can very easily get by with four different faces. A modern and old style, a transitional face, something special for ancient texts. That's what we have done. And of course you can use those same types over and over when they're hand set; there isn't much wear. One of the most important factors in handpress printing is the dampening of the paper. As a result, the type and the ink go into the fibers of the paper, which have been, of course, softened. You also use about one-third the amount of ink that you would normally use. As a result, you get better impressions: sharper and three-dimensional. Because of the inked type becoming part of the paper, it has a certain depth, a certain sculptural character that you can't get printing dry.

Teiser: Ed Grabhorn spoke in some detail about San Francisco and the humidity, the weather conditions being right



Teiser: for printing on dampened paper.\* This is a drier climate here [in Kentfield] is it not?

L. Allen: Yes. Yes, it is. We have built humidors for working with the dampened paper. These are simply wooden boxes lined with sponge rubber which has been soaked in water; they keep the paper moist for ten days or two weeks without any problem.

D. Allen: A very special invention by Lewis Allen. It had to be. It was so dry in the summer, it was impossible to keep the sheets uniform overnight, you see, in order to print the opposite side of the page the next day. I don't believe anyone has used humidors of our kind.

D. Allen: Each printer has his own little invention, you know.

L. Allen: In the early days the Grabhorns used to dampen quite a few of their pages for their books. But they have done it rarely in the last twenty years.

Teiser: I think he was speaking of *Leaves of Grass* specifically.

D. Allen: No doubt. That's so beautiful.

L. Allen: But you can't print really well on handmade paper without dampening it. It is just impossible. It looks very poorly.

Teiser: But is it because of the hard texture of it?

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\* Grabhorn, Edwin, *Recollections of The Grabhorn Press*, an interview in this series conducted in 1967.





L. Allen: Yes. It is hard paper, that is, well sized. Almost any all-rag paper is difficult to print on unless you dampen it. But these days, because of the extra time involved, it is not done. Also it takes two operators when using damped paper with a motor driven press, because one has to get the sheet ready to feed and pass it to the other person for actual feeding to the press. Whereas in a hand press you don't have that problem. Bill Everson and Ken Carpenter always dampen their paper, but very few others do any more. It is unfortunately rare.

Many printers have made much ado of dampening paper and perfection of the inking and all that sort of thing, for handpress printing. But it can be done very simply and effectively. In fact, we're just beginning now to write a book on handpress printing, which we will print. We get letters from people all over the country, plus visitors, who want to know how to do it, or they've been doing it and having problems. We've worked at it so long that maybe our experience can be of some help to them.

Anyway, it's a way of life when you really get into it deeply.



Teiser: There seems to be a kind of general division of opinion. Some people, people who admire a deep impression, are all for it. There are other people who say, "Oh, it's punch-through," or whatever they call it.

L. Allen: Yes, the Braille type of printing. Lawton Kennedy says that. Of course, his printing and all machine printing seems to have the appearance of lying precariously on the surface of the paper.

D. Allen: Is that what they call the kiss approach?

L. Allen: Yes, kiss impression. If you're printing dry and you simply punch the paper with the type--there's no reason for that at all. You really should dampen the paper and then the depth of the type into the paper is a perfectly natural thing, not contrived.

D. Allen: It never seems too deep.

Teiser: Does this depend on the paper being of a sufficient thickness not to show through on the other side? Is this the factor, or is it in the touch on the press?

L. Allen: It is in the touch primarily. If you're using thinner paper, you regulate the impression accordingly, so that the other side does not show too much impression.



D. Allen: [Otherwise] you can't print the other side of the sheet satisfactorily.

In a handpress you regulate all that easily; you can do anything you like. The inked type should become a natural part of the paper, not at all excessive.

L. Allen: There is, in other words, a happy medium where you still have the depth but without it being obnoxious. That's the theory.





Dorothy Allen - 1968  
The Allen Press



Dorothy and Lewis Allen  
1968 - The Allen Press





HANDPRESSES

Teiser: Perhaps this is one of the things that you think is immaterial, but I know people are always interested in what presses are used.

L. Allen: Yes, we've used various makes of handpresses: Washington, Albion, a Columbian, and an Acorn-Smith. They're practically the same as far as the results are concerned. At the moment we have a Columbian which is an 18 by 24 platen; our smaller press is a 10 by 15 Albion. (The former was manufactured in 1846, and the latter in 1895.)

Teiser: What was the one that you gave to the University at Santa Cruz?

L. Allen: An Acorn-Smith; quite a large press, with a platen 32 by 23 inches. It was made in Philadelphia about 1830. Actually large enough to print two newspaper pages. Incidentally we chose Santa Cruz because the University of California is our Alma Mater, because we favored the new academic system, and because it is difficult to say "no" to Don Clark, the librarian.

We used it for about ten years, but decided to shift to a medium-size press, with the idea it would be easier to operate. Also, this other press which was offered to us is reputed to be the most



L. Allen: beautiful press in the world. It is certainly the most ornate with the many many decorations gilded with 23 carat gold.

Teiser: Was the Acorn heavier to operate?

L. Allen: It was, of course, heavier and a bit more ponderous than our present large press. It enabled us to run larger forms. It took a little more strength to pull the bar, and the bed was heavier to roll in and out. But none of it is really too difficult physically. The energy required is equal to the ratio between the size of the press and the size of the form (type-page), a small form and big press being the easiest when pulling the bar for the impression.

D. Allen: If you work at it a little it's like any other exercise: it doesn't seem too difficult. For myself, I couldn't do it. It would take me a long time to get the feel of it enough to pull that bar at least a hundred and fifty times a day--as Lewis does. It would be almost impossible for me to do. And that's just the actual printed pages. Because he's always taking advance proof pages, and also proofs for the next day. Maybe two hundred times, at least, you pull that bar each day. There's a knack to it, I'll admit.



Teiser: This may be one of the reasons why more people aren't hand printers.

D. Allen: But you don't have to have a large press, you know. You can have one of the small models, which is delightful.

L. Allen: A small one is very easy to work. You can print a medium-sized book on it, as we did on the 10 by 15 Albion when we were living in the south of France in 1957-1958. We printed an octavo book, the *Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

D. Allen: Which Lewis illustrated. We're even to the point of illustration.

Teiser: You printed that on the small one?

L. Allen: Yes, on the small Albion press. Both of our present presses were obtained from a London firm. As we said, earlier, it is possible to get these handpresses. From about 1820 to 1900 many of these iron handpresses were made both in England and the United States. Although a number have been junked, you can still find them.

Teiser: It seems to me that I've seen many broken ones around.

L. Allen: You can go to a machine shop and tell them just what you need in the way of a missing part; then they can make it for you.



Teiser: Is there anyone who specializes in rebuilding, repairing, handpresses?

L. Allen: I don't think so any more.

D. Allen: Who is this chap that was here the other day that is collecting antique presses?

L. Allen: From Los Angeles, Ernest Lindner.

D. Allen: He stopped by and wanted to see some of the parts, and how it was put together because he bought a very large Columbian and was taking it on a trailer to Chicago for a printer's supply convention. One as large as the Mackenzie [and] Harris model [San Francisco].

Teiser: It's like collecting railroads. . .

D. Allen: Yes!

Lewis, in searching for a medium size Columbian (18 by 24), found, through a London company with whom we corresponded, several presses which later came to California because they were too large for us, but appealed to others in this area. Carroll Harris is one; Dan Solo is another. Also, Quyle in Murphys, and Carpenter\* in Reno have recently acquired large Columbians.

L. Allen: But the last two bought independently.

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\* Kenneth Carpenter at the University of Nevada Library.





Teiser: They're all operating occasionally?

L. Allen: Rather sporadically. In fact, Carroll Harris ran off one broadside, and that was it. But it's mostly because they don't know how to do it simply and easily. That's what I hope to accomplish in this book that we're writing: to be able to explain methods so that people are not frustrated when they start using a handpress. It's a very simple tool, actually! There are a few refinements necessary to operate it properly.

Teiser: Have you seen the one that's operating up in Columbia at the little newspaper office there?

L. Allen: No.

D. Allen: There's one in Virginia City of the same type too. But they weren't working on it. It was just sitting in the back of the office.

Teiser: I should ask about the cost of handpresses. Are they considerably below power presses?

L. Allen: Yes. They run from \$350 to \$750, depending on the size. Of course, they never seem to wear out; there is little maintenance involved.

Teiser: So it really can be . . .

L. Allen: Yes, it's very economical.

D. Allen: If they're antiques, however--or should I say rarities in style--they might be quite valuable--



D. Allen: like that Acorn,\* which is one of a kind.

Teiser: Is it?

D. Allen: Yes. It's worth a great deal more. And our  
Columbian is also unique.

L. Allen: This press that we have now is reputed to be the  
most beautiful printing press in the world,  
according to the people in London. They were  
worried about the fact that the British Fine Arts  
Council wouldn't allow it to leave the country  
because it is unique, an exceedingly handsome  
antique.

D. Allen: Actually, it was displayed in the reception room  
of this London company, McCorquodale, that had  
used it for many years. In fact, it was their  
first press when they started business in 1846.  
When they adopted motor presses, they rejuvenated  
it, including gilding the many raised decorations.

Teiser: It was a British-made press?

L. Allen: Yes. But made after the design of an American,  
George Clymer, who was the one who invented the  
first successful iron handpress, about 1817. He  
wasn't able to sell very many of them in America,

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\* The Acorn-Smith, now in the Library of the Uni-  
versity of California, Santa Cruz



L. Allen: so he went to London and showed his model to the printers there. They became very enthusiastic and he sold a great many of them. The presses were made in London and Edinburgh. Many Paris printers also bought Columbian presses.

D. Allen: Oh, you find them all over. The Book Club has one that John Jones of the Western Newspaper Union found in Santa Cruz County. He had a machinist make some missing parts. He was going to sell it to the Smithsonian, but for some reason he gave it to the Book Club, which is very nice.

Teiser: Is it used there at all?

L. Allen: No. About five years ago--maybe it was ten--I said I would print a broadside for them on it at the Club's offices. So far it's just a pleasant dream.

Teiser: It would be wonderful for one of their exhibition openings.

L. Allen: Yes, it would.

D. Allen: I think they should rejuvenate that press and use it anyway. Allow young printers to use it. Don't you think that would be a good idea? Of course, they need more room at the Book Club as it is, without getting students. But still, it would be a wonderful opportunity.



- Teiser: It kind of makes my hair stand on end thinking of kids seeing the old press at Columbia, assuming it to be typical. It was such a messy shop there.
- L. Allen: We keep our shop rather neat because we can't find things otherwise.
- D. Allen: [Lewis is] fundamentally a neat person about everything. You know, it's organization. And I think that pays off in efficiency.
- L. Allen: Some people can have things stacked two feet high and can reach in and pull out what they want; which I can never do. I guess you have to have a better memory.





BINDINGS AND BOXES

Teiser: Let me go way over to the final end of book making, the binding. Good binding for good books seems to be the world's greatest rarity.

L. Allen: That's the way to put it, I think. Mrs. Allen does most of the binding.

D. Allen: Ah, but we do it together; let's put it down that way. Because it is a two-man project in our household very definitely. From start to finish. The design--we choose a pattern for the book, the materials we're going to use, after deciding on the text.

At last, when the printing is concluded, we begin to work on the binding. Lewis draws up plans for the spacing of the material on the book itself, on the boards. The boards are cut. When we put it together, one is pasting one part while the other is getting the boards ready. [When] we're putting them in the standing press, one's taking them out while the other is making another case. We do this together very definitely.

Teiser: What method of binding do you use?

D. Allen: You'd call it case binding in the trade. We like to have it sewn on tapes, for durability.

L. Allen: At one time, a number of years ago, we did take



L. Allen: hand binding from Peter Fahey for about three years. That gave us our start in binding.

D. Allen: A taste for it. Peter, I think, would have preferred that we'd gone on with hand-binding. You know, a fine hand-binding, when we're producing 140 copies, would be impossible. So we had to evolve this system of case binding. We did have Wheeler do some binding when we were first beginning, because we didn't feel up to doing that many books. But we chose all the materials.

Teiser: Bill Wheeler?

L. Allen: Yes, he used to work for the Grabhorns.

D. Allen: I think the only process we're not doing ourselves is the sewing. We do everything else.

Teiser: Do you have them sewn commercially?

D&L Allen: Yes.

D. Allen: We've had some of them hand sewn when we felt the book really needed it. But that is a rarity--and of course out of the question in most cases.

L. Allen: We feel that we can't charge maybe more than \$65 to \$85 for a book, suspecting that there is probably a ceiling in there. But we used to think similarly when we were charging only \$35, \$45 for a book. Then it became necessary to move it up to \$65 and \$85 a copy, but there didn't seem to be any resistance on the part of the buyers.



D. Allen: We're using better materials all the way along the line. As we did that, of course it cost much more. And we do spend six to nine months on each edition.

L. Allen: We have done two titles in one year.

D. Allen: But that's too much.

L. Allen: It's more fun to take it a little more leisurely if we can.

Teiser: You don't make your own book boxes, do you?

L. Allen: No. Usually, we have them made here, although we have had them made in France. It is a very special job and takes more space than we have, and some additional machinery. So we let others do it. Here in San Francisco Cardoza-James has made most of our slipcases and boxes recently. They do a fine job.

D. Allen: We think that they do the best that we've found. Beautiful finish.

L. Allen: We buy the paper or cloth, and the boards, and they put them together.

D. Allen: We take them a dummy copy and then they work from that. Fine workmen.



THE EDITION DE LUXE

- Teiser: I read this morning, your article on the . . .
- L. Allen: Oh, yes, the *edition de luxe*.\*
- Teiser: And I was astounded by the fact that you had found in the many recent books that you had looked at in the Bibliotheque Nationale, evidence everywhere of good craftsmanship, because this was supposed to be going out of style so to speak.
- L. Allen: It is going out of style, unfortunately.
- Teiser: It still exists, however, at Cardoza-James?
- L. Allen: Yes, they do have fine handcraftsmen. They are usually older men who've been at it a long time. There are few apprentices, which is true of anything involving fine craftsmanship.

In Paris most of the master printers whom we visited during the years had handpresses in their shops and used to use them especially to print wood engravings, or any form of a relief block illustration. But in recent years when I've visited them, the handpresses have been pushed into a corner and are gathering dust. Because they have become economically unsound, they find

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\* "The Evolution of an Edition de Luxe" in *Quarterly Newsletter*, Book Club of California, Spring 1962.





L. Allen: that it's necessary to use a motor-driven press even though they can't do the work as well.

Teiser: So the reservoir of craftsmanship is fading away?

L. Allen: Yes. It certainly is. I think, therefore, as we mentioned earlier, handpress printing is a fine medium for those with more leisure than they used to have, and also for the early retirement people. And maybe those are the ones who will be somewhat responsible for a revival in fine craftsmanship relating to the book. Because if they do become dedicated, and although they work only weekends, they can produce very fine things.

D. Allen: It assumes, first of all, some interest in books. I don't know that many people have that.

Teiser: I gather from looking at your bibliography that your interest starts with the text, and you have considerable literary interest in the first place.

L. Allen: Yes, that's true.

Teiser: Some people who like to print don't care much what they print.

L. Allen: True. They're happy as long as they press inked type to paper.

Teiser: Are you both great readers?

L. Allen: Yes, we are. Practically every night or weekend we spend many hours reading. We do some of our



L. Allen: reading with an idea that it will involve some text for a future book of ours.

Teiser: Do you read much French?

L. Allen: No, unfortunately. We don't have any real facility.

Teiser: The texts that you have printed seem to be very carefully selected.

D. Allen: It seems too bad to spend so much time out of one's life printing something that isn't worthwhile. It does take many hours of work. If the text hasn't true depth, there is no point in doing it.

L. Allen: I think that is a real problem: finding a text with sufficient immortality to justify all of these fine materials and all of the hours of hand work. And to find something that maybe isn't too long and something that has not already been done in a limited edition that's well done. That is one of our main problems. We're always, of course, searching for something that will fill that need.

For example, our last book, the one with illustrations by Albrecht Dürer: some years ago we saw, in an exhibition of illustrated Terence plays through the years, a mention that in 1492-93, Albrecht Dürer had illustrated Terence for a Basle publisher; but they were never used because a Lyons publisher had just issued an illustrated



L. Allen: edition of Terence. Eventually these Dürer drawings found their way into the Basle Art Museum. We wrote to them and they gave us permission to use them. This is their first use in a book.\*

Teiser: Did it take a good deal of detective work to run them down?

D. Allen: A good many letters back and forth. Such a nice reception. They were delighted, of course, to get them out.

L. Allen: Yes, there were twenty-seven of them.

D. Allen: They took photographs and then had to repeat them because their regular photographer was on vacation. They were so kind. One of my ambitions is to go back to Basle and take the book personally, just meet these people who have been corresponding with us all the time.

L. Allen: Then for the book before that, there was the *Dialogues of Creatures*, which was printed in England in 1481... We were walking through the British Museum looking at the books exhibited in the cases. We were strolling independently and we both stopped at this one case, alternately. When we got together at the end of a half-hour, we both

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\* *The Brothers*, 1968.



L. Allen: mentioned the same book as being a very desirable book for us to produce.

So we went to the office and obtained reading cards in order to see it and similar editions. Eventually that became our next book. It seems to take constant searching in order to find something of merit. Then, after we returned here, we learned that there was a copy at the Huntington Library. We used their copy in order to reproduce the 122 woodcut illustrations.

Teiser: When you work from a previous edition, do you get a photographic copy to set the type from?

D. Allen: Yes. Here's what he's talking about that we found in the British Museum.

L. Allen: It's very unusual text. But these things are difficult to locate, and you have to be extremely vigilant in order to find them.

Sir Francis Meynell, in London, said one of the reasons he didn't revive the Nonesuch Press after the war is he ran out of suitable texts. He couldn't seem to find anything that had not been done a dozen times and that was at the same time important.

D. Allen: We thought that sounded very strange at the time. But I think very often Lewis has felt the same





D. Allen: way--what will we do now?

This was *The Brothers* we just finished [showing the book]. We sent to Germany for the tape spine.

Teiser: Just as it is?

D. Allen: Just as it is. These were the illustrations that were in the Basle museum.

Teiser: Do you work from metal cuts?

D. Allen: Yes. Here's the title page [showing it]. You just cut out some of the characters, you see, and then use them throughout.

L. Allen: In most cases we do work from metal cuts. But in the case of a living illustrator we work directly from the blocks. For example, Blair Hughes-Stanton, who we think is the top wood engraver in England, has illustrated three of our books, and he has sent the blocks over here. That has, however, resulted in a problem. Because it is so damp in England and so dry here, when the blocks arrive, sometimes they begin to separate or warp and it is a really hell of a job to work with them.

Teiser: Do you try to get them into humidity, then?

L. Allen: Yes, we do moisten them and squeeze them together. And so far we've been lucky enough to prevent a disaster.



D. Allen: One wouldn't think of all these things, you know.  
It was a new problem.

Teiser: That they would dry that quickly . . .

D. Allen: Yes. Just shipping them here. He said he'd never heard of such a thing. Of course he was horrified. His beautiful blocks were separating.

L. Allen: Similarly, when we imported our large Columbian press they had covered the tympan in London with a parchment, a skin. When it arrived here, about two or three days after we set the press up, it began to shrink, due to our dry climate; and the iron frame it was fastened to was pulled out of shape. We had to cut it off and put on a regular oiled paper tympan, which is available here. It's amazing how much difference there is.

D. Allen: It was pulled completely out of kilter, you know. Three ways. He [Lewis] just came out with his eyes open. He said, "You don't know what's happened!" It looked as though the whole tympan-frisket unit was collapsing.

L. Allen: That is one of the nice things about working with someone locally, like Mallette Dean, who has illustrated quite a few of our books. When he works with the wood--he's only about fifteen minutes from us--we can go up to his studio and work with him on



L. Allen: the layouts, so we have much more control. And then of course there's no warping of the wood. Just put it in our press.

Teiser: You're speaking of his own illustrations.

L. Allen: Which he does for our books.

Teiser: He doesn't execute the work of others for you, does he?

D. Allen: No. Lewis knows what he wants. He makes the sketches and Mallette develops them.

Teiser: Oh, I see, you work with him that way.

L. Allen: Yes. He is a very fine artist, as you know, and a marvelous craftsman.

D. Allen: He makes what you want come true.

L. Allen: Yes, he is really wonderful to work with and understands what one wants.

Teiser: I think Mrs. Allen mentioned, that you have done illustrations for one of the books.

D. Allen: For two.

Teiser: What medium did you use?

L. Allen: They were a combination of wood, pen and ink, and also cloth over wood, and linoleum; mixed together for a certain effect.

D. Allen: *Murders in the Rue Morgue* was one.

L. Allen: And *The Fall* by Camus. It is stimulating to do any illustrations yourself when you want to produce the



L. Allen: entire process on your own.

D. Allen: We were living in France at the time. This was another wonderful time to have fun, you know, to do everything yourself. Now, you see, that's a wood block, back of that. [Looking at *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.] And then there is the line drawing. This is linoleum, and this was a wood-block. Then, of course, he had the cuts made of the lettering. This is some of that French paper that is just like cloth. Richard de Bas, from the French mill. It just feels like cloth, doesn't it?

Teiser: Yes! And you did several illustrations of this?

D. Allen: Lewis did all of them. Everything.

Teiser: Are they all nonrepresentational?

L. Allen: Well, they are symbolic of something in the text. They are all related to the text.

D. Allen: The different pattern of design in the center. But I just love them. Using the same layout for each.

Teiser: Beautiful color and beautiful design.

Have you printed many contemporary texts like the Camus?

L. Allen: No, we haven't, unfortunately. We would like to do more of them. In the last few years, we have done, besides the Camus. . .the only thing within





L. Allen: sixty years has been Henry James' *The Beast in the Jungle*.

D. Allen: The illustrations that he did for this book of Camus', *The Fall*: Now this is using a piece of pique material on the block, the background block, first.

Teiser: So you worked it out right on the press, so to speak?

D&A Allen: Oh, yes.

D. Allen: Always done that way.

L. Allen: That, of course, is representing the three characters in the bar.

D. Allen: I think it's terribly clever.

L. Allen: It's more typographic in its illustrations than anything else.

D. Allen: This one, I like that. *The Beast in the Jungle* was the other [showing it].

L. Allen: That was Blair Hughes [-Stanton].

D. Allen: Great wood engraving.

Teiser: He made two blocks for each, did he?

L. Allen: Yes.

Teiser: The gray and the color.

D. Allen: That's right. Actually, the three are the two shades of it.

L. Allen: There is the gray, gray-black, and then the other.

Teiser: There are three blocks for each?



L. Allen: No, there were two blocks on these. The illustrations that he did for Joseph Conrad's *Youth* is the one which had nine colors. You can see from his technique that he is really a marvelous artist.

And it's fun, of course, to work with these people.

D. Allen: Florence Walter bound this, *Youth*, in a most *beautiful* fashion for us. It's the only one of her bindings that we have. She's one of *the* binders in America today.

Block upon block upon block upon block had to be run through [for the illustrations].

L. Allen: It was a real problem because it was necessary to keep the paper damp for about ten days, and it was during the summer when it was quite warm. After about six or seven days a mould began to form on the paper. We phoned over to the California Chemical Company to see if they had some insecticide that we could put in the water that we dampened the paper with, to kill the mould. They were interested in the problem and sent some powder which I put in. But then I became very ill. I had a gastric problem and a cough, and so forth. One of our doctor friends came over about that time and I explained the problem. I didn't know



L. Allen: it was caused by this chemical. He asked to look at the packaging of the chemical. He said, "You have mercury in here which has gotten into your hands, through your skin and that has entered your intestines."

So from then on we used rubber gloves and a mask when we worked. We had quite a problem.

D. Allen: That was a terrible summer.

L. Allen: One of the hazards of printing with dampened paper. In the summertime, anyway. [Laughter]. But now I think we have everything solved. Also, formaldehyde can be used in the water. So if the problem occurs again we'll know how to face it.

Teiser: You don't ordinarily use that many colors?

L. Allen: No.



BOOKS OF THE ALLEN PRESS

D. Allen: We often used full cloth bindings. This\*is a Fortuny print done in Venice, made by hand. There was a Fortuny exhibit here. I don't know whether you noticed it out at the De Young Museum just recently.

L. Allen: We used three books bound in the Fortuny hand made material such as this. This was for a Gertrude Atherton book edited by Oscar Lewis, the one called *The Splendid Idle Forties*. Mallette Dean did some very beautiful initials for it that were hand colored by Dorothy.

D. Allen: We may go back to the little books.

Teiser: I was about to say that you print both large and small.

L. Allen: Yes. We've been having a run now for about five or six years on large books.

Teiser: What are the comparative advantages and disadvantages of large and small books?

L. Allen: One time I walked into the Grabhorn shop. I was talking to Ed and he asked what book we were doing, and the size of it. He said, "You know, for the same amount of work, you can get a lot more money

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\* *A Venetian Story* by Lord Byron.





L. Allen: out of a folio than you can out of a duodecimo or small book."

D. Allen: Doesn't that sound like Ed? [Laughter]

L. Allen: Yes, he's very practical. We said, "There must be something in that." We began producing large books. It really didn't take much more time or much more in the way of material expense. And yet we could charge more for it: the people liked the idea of a larger book. And of course it looked more sumptuous, and gave us more elbow room to express ourselves typographically. Of course, we began getting some complaints from people saying they had no place to put these books except under the bed. [Laughter]

D. Allen: Actually that wasn't the reason. We were at that time--I think both of us--interested in the French style of art books, that seemed so exciting to handle. There are so many standard books, just the regular shop book. And it seemed what we were doing would be done better in a folio size book, which I think it has turned out to be.

This is, I guess, the first book we did--  
first real book....

Teiser: What is that?

D. Allen: This is Lewis's father's, little memories of his



D. Allen: many travels around the world. Then we did it for his birthday.

Our brother-in-law, William Gaskin, is a watercolor artist. He painted a redwood tree because this was Lewis's father's love, the great redwood trees here in Marin County and everywhere. He produced a little original painting for each of the copies that we gave Lewis's father on his birthday. [Its title is] *The Trail of Beauty*. He lives in San Francisco.

L. Allen: He teaches at Rudolph Schaefer's school.\*

I think, as I mentioned earlier, we were influenced by the French edition, *edition de luxe*. We've done several in that spirit, like the *Mirroure of the World*. And of course, the Yvan Goll. . .

D. Allen: . . .which is typically French, with illustrations by Fernand Leger, Picasso, Jean Arp, and Yves Tanguy.

L. Allen: The box was made in Paris [showing the book, *Four Poems of the Occult*].

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\* William Gaskin died in July 1968



Teiser: That is the one that you describe in your article in the Book Club Quarterly, is it not?

L. Allen: Yes, I guess it is. It is unsewn, of course, and is in five sections. We printed the numbers in blind. This is the title page. It is somewhat in the spirit of French bookmaking.

Teiser: What is the type for the title?

L. Allen: It was drawn by Mallette Dean. He also did these initials for us, and the marginal cuts that were developed by us in the spirit of each artist. It was quite a project. It is, I think, quite exciting because of the illustrations by four such renowned artists.

D. Allen: This is the other one, *The Mirrour of the World*.

L. Allen: This was done also in the French manner.

D. Allen: Again unsewn.

Teiser: Maybe this is the answer to the binding problem, really.

L. Allen: I think it is.

D. Allen: These boxes were made in France.



- D. Allen: [The illustrations are] all in the style--Lewis would tell Mallette the effect he wanted: the French approach, with a lavish, colorful method.
- Teiser: Yes, a great deal of spirit.
- L. Allen: Yes, I think that is the word for the better French books: there is a spirit, a sort of casualness--I mean very carefully planned, but it looks casual. It looks unstandardized, unregimented, and not done with a slide rule. So many printers today, I think, design books so that they look mechanical--everything, the margins, the illustrations and so forth, are done to a certain rule and as a result they look rather sterile.
- Teiser: You, of course, choose a text of a (to use an over-worked word) creative kind.
- L. Allen: It does lend itself to that, yes. You, of course, couldn't do it with a textbook. Or even nonfiction.
- Teiser: You have been singularly free of reprints of Californiana, haven't you?
- L. Allen: To a certain extent.
- Teiser: I think there were two or three.
- D. Allen: At the beginning.





- L. Allen: Yes. Most of those that we did for the Book Club of California had to be of that subject.
- D. Allen: They couldn't be over a certain price. You know, you're somewhat limited. We had to print so many. That doesn't lead to much individuality.
- L. Allen: But one can't say enough for The Book Club of California because they have given many commissions, usually about three a year, to the so-called fine printers throughout California, which has helped them financially and also stimulated them. And I think that the Book Club, more than any other organization, has done the most to stimulate fine printing in this area.
- D. Allen: Very definitely. It certainly was so for us. I'm sure every other printer feels the same.
- L. Allen: We've done seven books for them.
- Teiser: What size are your editions for the most part?
- L. Allen: Usually from 130 to 140 copies.
- Teiser: You know your market very closely, don't you?
- L. Allen: Yes. That seems to be about right because they sell out almost always within three weeks after we send out our prospectus. That's what we like.



L. Allen: If we have an inventory of unsold books, it seems to make us nervous, as though we are losing an audience, or don't have one. Although we did do 400 copies for the Book Club.

D. Allen: Well, they're publishing it, not we.

Teiser: Of this last book?

L. Allen: It was December, '66, for their Christmas book.

Teiser: What was that book?

L. Allen: That was *The Great Polyglot Bibles*. We had to work it in two shifts. In other words, instead of printing the entire run of one side on one day, we had to print the same sheet on two succeeding days, doing about 210 each day.

D. Allen: [Aside] Which is too many.

L. Allen: So we ended with 420; then there was a spoilage of about ten (an average of ten out of the 420), so we came out with 410 books. But it's a lot of work to run that many in a day on a hand-press, and to run the same pages on two succeeding days. I suppose it could become boring if you did it very much.

D. Allen: I think so. It ceases to be exciting, and I believe it should be exciting.

Teiser: Is that an average spoilage?

L. Allen: It is with us, yes. In the book that we did



- L. Allen: last fall<sup>\*</sup>, there were over 200 pages and there were 120 illustrations. We had a press run of 141 and we came out with 137 books.
- D. Allen: Isn't that wonderful?
- L. Allen: So we had only four spoilage. If we'd thrown out any more we'd have to throw out the whole book because there wasn't really very much difference between the various pages. I think that is a little better than most hand-printers do. It is due entirely to experience rather than to any special manual dexterity. It's just a matter of doing it so much that it becomes sort of natural to you; you can tell very quickly when the ink on a page is slightly heavier than what you want, or a little bit under, and you can immediately make the change to correct it.

That's another thing, I think, in regard to motor-driven machines, and especially automatic machines. By the time you look at it and see that it's becoming a little heavy, and press the button, you've run a lot more. Then there seems to be something psychological about the machine: you must pay for that machine and therefore you have to keep it

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<sup>\*</sup>Cervantes, Miguel de, *The Dialogues of the Dogs*.



L. Allen: running. There seems to be a mental barrier to reach over and stop the press in order to make the necessary adjustments. Of course, in a handpress, you do not have that problem.

D. Allen: You're already stopped, on every sheet.  
[Laughter]





FIRST DRAFT OF THE INTRODUCTION TO  
*Printing With The Handpress*  
by  
Lewis Allen  
To Be Printed and Published by  
The Allen Press, 1969

One of the greatest pleasures possible to man is intelligence and knowledge and discipline guiding the hand to create beautiful and useful things. This human, and therefore expressive, element is dominant in handpress printing. The handpress not only records, it glorifies because the hand-printed sheet emanates a unique liveliness and sparkle, and to the touch a sculptural character.

This manual is for potential professionals and serious amateurs who wish to operate a handpress effectively, but simply and easily. However, we will not discuss operations which are basic to all forms of printing--such as design, type-setting, make-ready, binding. There are many adequate books on these subjects, and we have listed some in the Appendix.

Printing with the handpress can be a way of life. But she isn't a particularly jealous mistress; for he who sleeps with her need not sleep on a cast-iron bed. You can be completely dedicated so that the handpress becomes a full-time vocation, or it can be used as an avocation. Available time is not really a factor; hours can be found for anything we



enjoy doing. It depends on your temperament and aptitude, on your point of view: like the two men trapped in mountain snow: one sees approach a St. Bernard with cask of cognac, and exclaims, 'at last, here comes man's best friend'; and his companion replies, 'yes, and there's a dog, too'.

Similarly, there are two basic and complementary reasons for the handpress: what the operator may accomplish in that medium, and what that medium may do for the operator.

First, with a knowledgeable use of the handpress, you can produce the most beautiful printing of all: crisp, glowing, three-dimensional impressions on lovely handmade paper. Why is this true? Simply because you enjoy complete control of the tool; every inking, every impression is adjusted towards perfection. And you will take pride in this use of mind and hand to produce printing not attainable on motor-driven, high-speed machines. Of course, the rewards are in proportion to the quality of the product. Fundamentally, the hand acts under the direction of the mind and will of the operator; the power comes from his body, and his body feels the resistance to it. Therefore, the sense of touch is employed as well as the sense of sight. The relationship of the handpress to the motor-driven press is similar to that between the sailboat and the power cruiser. In the former, you participate directly in the ambience of the sea and its elements, and in hand-printing you have the most direct and



stimulating intercourse with ink, paper and press. A most important factor in the excellence of handpress printing is the use of damped paper; without it, in fact, the handpress loses one of its most important virtues.

Although we will describe the technique of damping later, we will insert here a few words by the great typographer Bruce Rogers:

'On those rare and happy occasions when time and expense are secondary, and where the finest possible finished product is desired, printing on damped paper, if skillfully done, will produce a result much superior to the ordinary dry printing. The punching of the type into the softened paper raises printing almost from a two- to a three-dimensional medium, and the slight halo or highlight created around the individual recessed letters gives a sparkle and life to the page which cannot be obtained by dry printing. Moreover, as less ink is required, a cleaner impression is possible and the vigorous pressure of the type into the paper causes the print to become an integral part of the paper, rather than merely to lie on the surface. It should suffice to say that all the fine books of the past were printed on dampened paper, including those of the modern English 'revivalist' presses,



Kelmscott, Ashendene, Doves, etc.'

Most of us have admired the beauty--the inspired craftsmanship and physical quality--of books from Kelmscott and similar presses. But today, with improved methods and superior mechanical aids, it is possible to improve on their presswork. Fine craftsmanship takes very little more time and effort; actually it is merely the desire plus knowing how, and this latter point is what we hope to accomplish with this manual. The most recent definitive manuals were published more than a century ago. They are completely obsolete now, and seriously misleading because of our improved presses, ink, inking rollers, paper damping techniques, and other refinements.

Now, what can the handpress do for the operator? In addition to the pleasure and satisfaction born of creating something beautiful, useful and permanent, it can provide a most rewarding means of occupying leisure hours. Because its action is quiet, vibrationless and hand-motivated, it may be installed anywhere from a city apartment to a mountain cabin.

It has been remarked that the most costly disease in contemporary society is boredom--costly both for the individual and the community. Such boredom is related directly to the shorter work week, earlier retirement, and increased life expectancy. Leisure time is potentially man's greatest gift to himself; actually, it is a problem of frightening dimensions.





People have more time on their hands than their knowledge, interests and aptitudes can accommodate. Beside adding leisure hours, automation and motor-driven machinery have curtailed man's basic need for the creative use of his hands. The handpress adequately satisfies this need, and also provides collateral interests not offered by other crafts: literature, book design, illustrations, the art of the woodcut and other mediums of relief prints, handmade paper, book-collecting, and the fascinating history of hand-printing, letter forms, and type. C. H. St. John Hornby said of his Ashendene Press: "My Press has been the most absorbing interest of my life, and I never tire of thinking over the many happy hours I spent in that little room at Shelley House. The satisfaction to be got out of a handicraft is only known to those who have experienced it. It is a wonderful relaxation, too, from all the cares of life and business worries. I wouldn't have been without it for anything."

As a virtue of the handpress medium, we have mentioned the creation of something permanent. Along this line, Edwin Grabhorn of the Grabhorn Press has written: 'One of the modern criticisms of William Morris and the private presses that he inspired is that too much stress was placed on method. Method means how a thing is done and how a thing is done is of very vital importance if we want to give our work durability. . . . Morris knew, because he was a collector of the earliest printed books, that those books could not have



descended to him, looking as sparkling and vital as the day they left their makers' hands, without honesty of craftsmanship. It was the craftsmanship that Morris revived, and that we today will have to revive again before our books can have any claims to a long life. . . .I can speak with some authority of dampening a sheet of fine paper. Such a process takes time, but if you think the time not well spent compare a book from the Kelmscott Press with any of the books of our best machine printers today.'

Another thought on hand-printing comes from Eric Gill: 'The Commercial article at its best is simply physically serviceable and, *per accidens*, beautiful in its efficiency; the work of art at its best is beautiful in its very substance and, *per accidens*, as serviceable as an article of commerce.'

In conclusion, printing with the handpress can be a completely satisfying craft--even an art--for both professionals and hobbyists when knowledge and desire yield a product of high quality. The professional, under congenial circumstances, can develop an adequate income: necessary for this is a high level in text, design and printing; the issuing of two limited (130-150) editions of books each year; and a sound mailing list of individual collectors and libraries interested in the handmade book. Your profit is enhanced if you, yourself, perform all facets of bookmaking: designing, type-setting, printing, binding, and publishing; and for part-time help, a sympathetic, industrious and talented wife or friend.



Finally, we must now define 'handpress': It is one where the type or any relief surface is inked by a hand-held roller, the paper fed by hand, and the impression activated by hand. To complete the handicraft picture, the types should be set by hand, and the handmade or mouldmade paper must be damped for printing.

There are two kinds of handpresses which answer our definition: the platen variety such as the Columbian, Albion, and Washington; and the cylinder press such as the Asbern and Vandercook--but only when their automatic inking unit is detached. Only these two kinds have the power necessary to give strong impressions. The operator must have complete hand control in order to satisfy the delight in craftsmanship and perfection of results.



Check-list of Books Produced by The Allen Press, 10 Ridgecrest Road,  
Kentfield, California

Established in 1939 by Lewis & Dorothy Allen, the first imprint was The Press of Lewis & Dorothy Allen, then The L-D Allen Press, and finally the Allen Press. Titles 1 - 5 were printed in San Francisco; 6 - 9 in Hillsborough; #10 in Belvedere; #11 in Cagnes-Sur-Mer, France; 12 - 21 in Kentfield; #22 in Cap d'Antibes, France; #23 in Kentfield. Numbers 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 22, 23 (and all future books) were printed on a handpress. Number 21 was designed at The Allen Press, but the printing, binding and publishing was done by Mallette Dean while the Allens were living in France. All books were hand-set except numbers 6, 7, and 20; all were printed on all-rag paper, and when handmade it is so stated; all were bound in boards, usually by Dorothy Allen; and all titles were published by the Allens except where specified otherwise. All titles are out of print.

1. THE TRAIL OF BEAUTY by Harris S. Allen. Piranesi type; English handmade paper; an original water-color by William Gaskin. 100 copies, 9 x 6. 1940.
2. THE FIRST CALIFORNIAC by Victor Fourgeaud. Introduction by Carroll D. Hall. Bulmer type. 225 copies, 7 x 6. 1942.
3. THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL (excerptus) by James Russell Lowell. Cloister type. 75 copies, 4 x 4½. 1943.
4. HERALDRY OF NEW HELVETIA. The cattle brands registered at Sutter's Fort, edited and with an introduction by Carroll D. Hall. Bulmer type. 250 copies, 10½ x 7. Published by The Book Club of California, 1945.
5. THE DIARY OF PATRICK BREEN, edited and with an introduction by George R. Stewart. Bulmer type. 300 copies, 8½ x 5½. Published by The Book Club of California, 1946.
6. DONNER MISCELLANY, edited by Carroll D. Hall. Janson type. 350 copies, 10 x 6½. Published by The Book Club of California, 1947.
7. ESSAYS OF MONTAIGNE, selected and translated by Francis Carmody. Garamond type; initial letters hand-illuminated in gold by Dorothy Allen; decorations by Mallette Dean. 200 copies, 10 x 6½. 1948.
8. THE CHRISTMAS FIRESIDE by Mark Twain. Bulmer type. 75 copies, 5½ x 4½. 1949.
9. ACROSS THE PLAINS by Robert Louis Stevenson. Introduction by Oscar Lewis; illustrations by Mallette Dean. Bulmer type. 200 copies, 10 x 6½. 1950.
10. WHAT MEN LIVE BY by Leo Tolstoy. Romanée type. English handmade paper printed damp (as in all handpress productions). Wood engravings by Mallette Dean, hand-colored by Dorothy Allen. 150 copies, 9½ x 6. 1951.





11. LA PORTE DE MALETROIT by Robert Louis Stevenson. Garamond type; French handmade paper; illustrations by Ray Bothers. 300 copies, 8½ x 6. Published by The Book Club of California, 1952.
12. ROUGHING IT IN CALIFORNIA by Mark Twain. Bulmer type; illustrations by Mallette Dean. 200 copies, 10 x 6½. 1953.
13. THE HIDDEN TREASURES by Honore de Balzac. Romanée type; English handmade paper. Wood engravings by Mallette Dean, hand-colored by Dorothy Allen. 160 copies, 9 x 6. 1953.
14. SNOWSHOE THOMPSON by Dan de Quille. Introduction by Carroll D. Hall. Bulmer type. 210 copies, 7½ x 5½. One of the Early California Travels Series, published by Glen Dawson, 1954.
15. THE PRIVATE JOURNALS OF STENDHAL, selected, edited and translated by Francis Carmody. Romanée type; wood engravings by Mallette Dean. English handmade paper. 175 copies, 10½ x 7. 1954.
16. A MILLIONAIRE OF ROUGH-AND-READY by Bret Harte. Bulmer type. 220 copies, 10 x 6½. 1955.
17. ON THE AMBITIOUS PROJECTS OF RUSSIA IN REGARD TO NORTH WEST AMERICA. Introduction by George P. Hammond. Bulmer type. 350 copies, 10 x 6½. Published by The Book Club of California, 1955.
18. THE NOBLE KNIGHT PARIS & THE FAIR VIENNE, translated from the French by William Caxton. Romanée type; French handmade paper; wood engravings by Mallette Dean, hand-colored by Dorothy Allen. 130 copies, 11 x 8 inches. 1956.
19. THE WRECK OF THE GOLDEN MARY by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. Bulmer type; handmade Japan vellum; wood engravings by Blair Hughes-Stanton. 200 copies, 10½ x 7 inches. 1956.
20. MARK TWAIN: SAN FRANCISCO CORRESPONDENT. Edited and with an introduction by Henry Nash Smith and Frederick Anderson. Janson type. 400 copies, 11½ x 8. Published by The Book Club of California, 1957.
21. THE DUCHOW JOURNAL, edited and with an introduction by George P. Hammond. Bulmer type; Italian handmade paper. The decorations, printing, binding and publishing are by Mallette Dean. 200 copies, 12 x 8½. 1958-59.
22. THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE by Edgar Allan Poe. Didot type, French handmade paper; illustrations by Lewis Allen. 150 copies, 10 x 6½. 1958.
23. YOUTH by Joseph Conrad. Goudy Modern type; French handmade paper. Illustrations of nine colors cut by Blair Hughes-Stanton. 140 copies, 16 x 10½. 1959.



24. THE SPLENDID IDLE FORTIES, Six Stories of Old California, by Gertrude Atherton. (One of the "Zamorano Eighty"). Selected and with an introduction by Oscar Lewis. Romanée type; all-rag paper from France; large decorative initials by Mallette Dean, hand-colored by Dorothy Allen. Printed on a handpress, in two colors, and published in 1960 by The Allen Press. 140 copies, 13½ x 9½.
25. FOUR POEMS OF THE OCCULT by Yvan Goll. Each of the four long poems is illustrated by a great artist of the French school: Leger, Picasso, Tanguy, and Arp. (Line drawings, lithographs, etchings, wood-engravings: 21 in all which were reproduced from the original French edition.) First English translation. Page size 16 x 11 inches; 200 pages printed by hand on Richard de Bas paper, handmade in France especially for The Allen Press. Each page has decorations in color in the style of the respective artist, done by Mallette Dean. The pages are gathered into five sections, unsewn in the French manner, and enclosed in a chemise and box handmade in Paris. Edition limited to 130 copies. 1962. (\$75)
26. THE BEAST IN THE JUNGLE by Henry James, with a preface by Clifton Fadiman. Illustrations by Blair Hughes-Stanton: two-color wood engravings (16). About 100 pages, 15 x 10 inches; all-rag, mould made Arches paper from France, printed by hand. Bound at the Press in handmade Italian cover paper. Printed in various colors. 1963, March. (\$38.50)
27. A VENETIAN STORY by Lord Byron. Thirty-five full page illustrations from rare copperplate engravings done in the eighteenth-century on Venice; they are from the collection of Philip Hofer of Harvard University. Page size 13 by 19 inches; all-rag, mould made Rives paper from France, unsewn, and contained in a portfolio covered in a Fortuny hand-blocked print from Venice; the portfolio enclosed in a hinged box. The edition limited to 150 copies. October, 1963. (\$40)
28. THE MIRROR OF THE WORLD, translated into English and first printed by William Caxton in 1481. Thirty-three illustrations reproduced from the original woodcuts; head and tail pieces in color on each page; 150 pages, 15 by 10 inches. 130 copies, unsewn Richard de Bas handmade paper from France. In a hinged box, lined with wood-veneer. 1964. (\$45)
29. THE FALL by Albert Camus. Six illustrations, plus title-page decoration, by Lewis Allen: these are in three to five colors, and printed from wood, linoleum, cloth, and line cuts. Arches all-rag, mould made paper from France, 15 by 10 inches, printed by hand. 112 pages, each in two colors. Edition limited to 140 copies. Bound at the Press in five panels of Fabriano cover paper from Italy. 1966. (\$45)



## The Allen Press check-list, continued.

30. THE GREAT POLYGLOT BIBLES by the Reverend Professor Basil Hall, Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History, University of Cambridge, England. Each copy contains an original leaf from the first polyglot bible -- the Complutensian, Spain, 1517. Italian Old Style types; French Rives all-rag paper, (pg. size 15 by 10 1/2), printed damp on an Acorn-Smith handpress; three colors on each page with many reproductions of revelant sixteenth-century woodcuts. The pages are unsewn, in the continental manner, and enclosed in a heavy hand-made paper from France, and further encased in a hinged box covered in cloth from France, especially made for this edition. Published by The Book Club of California, 1966. (\$47.50; for members only). 400 copies.
31. DIALOGUES OF CREATURES MORALISED. First produced in Latin, at Holland, 1480. Similar in theme and scope to Aesope's Fables. Goudy Thirty types, handset. 122 dialogues, each with an illustration reproduced from the original woodcuts of 1480. Paper Fabriano Book, handmade, (pg. size 13 by 9 1/2), printed damp on an Acorn-Smith handpress. Two colors on most pages. The cloth for the binding and slipcase is from France. 130 copies. \$85.00. 1967.
32. THE BROTHERS by Terence (160 B.C.) Illustrated with 27 pen and ink drawings by Albrecht Dürer, made originally in 1492. The present book is the first to use these illustrations. Unciala types; this is their first use in an American book. The paper was handmade in England to our specifications, and is watermarked The Allen Press; it was printed damp on a Columbian handpress, made in 1846. The page size is 13 by 9 inches, and each page has two and three colors. The binding consists in a decorated cloth spine from Germany, with sides of all-rag Italian paper over boards; the same paper covers the slipcase. 140 copies, \$65.00; 1968.
33. THE DIALOGUES OF THE DOGS by Miguel de Cervantes. Large marginal decorations in red of early Spanish initials, and similar designs engraved by Mallette Dean. Goudy Thirty types, handset. Paper handmade in England especially for the Press. Page size 11 1/2 by 8 1/2. Printed damp on a Columbia handpress. Bound in full cloth: hand-blocked Spanish 'Costa del Sol.' 130 copies. \$65.00. December 1968.
34. Work in Progress (1969). PRINTING WITH THE HANDPRESS, a definitive manual by Lewis Allen. Numerous illustrations. This is the first such manual in over 130 years; all the former manuals being now obsolete. Romanée types, handset. English handmade paper (The Allen Press watermark), printed damp on a Columbia handpress. Page size 12 by 8 1/2. 140 copies.



## The Evolution of an Edition de Luxe or April in Paris

By Lewis Allen\*

THE words "edition de luxe" are as nebulous as a politician's promise; so we hasten to explain that we will discuss only a small but significant facet of the subject: *les livres de peintres*. This term was adopted by the French to describe books illustrated by master painters and sculptors. We will admit that for this type of edition de luxe we are high-ranking panegyrists, and we believe that we have reason to be enthusiastic. These editions, which have been developed chiefly in France during the past fifty years, will probably be considered the most important contribution to the field of twentieth-century *beaux livres*. Why is this so?

*Les livres de peintres* boast a rare combination of man's greatest creative talent in the realms of literary and pictorial expression. And when these two attributes, in the more successful examples, have been combined harmoniously and tastefully by a master printer using excellent materials and superb craftsmanship, then certainly the wedding deserves an enthusiastic toast. And yet such books are rarely produced in America. Why? Perhaps because we cling to tradition and are just beginning to appreciate contemporary art; because our painters and sculptors continue to shy at books as an outlet for their art; because we do not understand the sound intrinsic value of these books; and because marketing them has been speculative, so that printer-publishers are loath to incur the considerable risk involved in bringing them out.

But the French continue their ardor for *les livres de peintres*, and consume almost all of these limited editions at an average of \$50 to \$500 per copy. To present an extreme case of ecstasy, in 1960

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\*Lewis Allen and his wife Dorothy are both management and labor at The Allen Press, Kentfield, California. They have been printing books for twenty-two years, many for the Club, and they now print exclusively on the hand press. Allen was editor of the *News-Letter* for some twelve years, and for many years was a director of the Club.





## Quarterly News-Letter

gathering the ingredients for our "contemporary ideal limited edition." These are: 1. significant text; 2. graphic work by a major painter or sculptor of the twentieth century which sensitively interprets the text (without dominating it); 3. a pleasing and natural typography to harmonize and act as the framework for ingredients 1 and 2; 4. a high degree of craftsmanship in the production of the book (this usually involves some hand work); 5. materials of high quality, to give permanence and to impart their own beauty; 6. a suitable, durable and attractive binding or box; 7. a final ingredient that may be likened to a seventh sense: it is the sum of the other six, wherein they are combined with delicacy, restraint and apparent casualness, without sign of sterile formula—but all in balance to subtly interpret the text.

This "ideal edition de luxe of the mid-twentieth century" does not appear difficult to achieve. Unfortunately, however, such editions are excessively rare. During the past ten years, we have thoroughly examined well over two hundred *livres de peintres* that have been published since 1945. Most of these editions were perused on countless days in the rare book room of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, through the kindness of Jacques Guignard, curator. Only fifteen or twenty approached our ideal, but these are among the most exciting and beautiful books we have ever seen. All of the seven ingredients are present, and there is an easy, fresh, non-contrived rightness to these books. They are alive and obviously of our time, rather than based on the past; they are young and virile. Also, there is evidence in them of hand-craftsmanship, of the warmth of a human heart and mind. Surely such books are among man's most satisfying artistic achievements.

The editions which we considered to be failures—about ninety per cent—disappointed us for the following reasons: many were dull and cold from being evolved obviously by formula; some made a spurious attempt at sumptuousness by using excessively large type sizes, unwarranted heavy paper, and mundane deposits of gold leaf; some contained grandiose illustrations unsympathetic with the text; some had typography inconsistent with the text and the art work; some used a format that was too square and ugly of proportions; and some showed a lack of harmony between size of type, leading, length of line, and margin areas (white space). But there was one quality that was evident in almost every book: skilled craftsmanship.



## The Book Club of California

The ingredients for our contemporary "ideal edition de luxe" are rather obvious—in fact, so deceptively simple that we of The Allen Press have been lured from the strict and all-too-narrow path of straight book-making. It seemed to us that it was about time for American collectors to be exposed to a *livre de peintres*. And so, with high enthusiasm, we cast about for a text which would be in English, and which would be illustrated by one or more of the great artists of our day.

To our aid came Francis Carmody,\* who suggested that we print the first English translation of four long poems by the noted French poet Yvan Goll, using the illustrations which appeared with the highly limited French edition. In France, each of the poems appeared separately; however, they use a central theme which justifies combining them into one book. One was illustrated with six line drawings by Fernand Léger (one of the great contemporary artists), one with four lithographs by Pablo Picasso (the master of them all), another with three etchings by Yves Tanguy (the most renowned of all surrealists), and the fourth with eight wood engravings by Jean Arp (a giant among the modern artists). Claire Goll, widow of the author, kindly gave us the rights to the unpublished English translations and the use of the original illustrations.

Because of the intricacies and the challenge of such a formidable undertaking, and because France is our second home, we embarked on a slow, slow boat to Paris via Japan, Southeast Asia, India, Turkey and Italy, arriving in Paris April 1 of last year.

During our "April in Paris," we were to organize all aspects of this edition de luxe—a true *livre de peintres*. This included: discussing at length with Mme Goll her husband's poetry and the translations; assembling the twenty-one illustrations; developing the design so that the contemporary text and illustrations would be presented in a strictly mid-twentieth-century manner with the highest possible degree of hand-craftsmanship; calling on type-founders and paper and ink companies; solving the problem of binding or de luxe hinged boxes; visiting again the dozen or so master printers to observe new techniques; examining more ex-

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\*Dr. Carmody is Professor of French at the University of California. Previously, he had done two translations into English for The Allen Press (*Essays of Montaigne* and *The Private Journals of Stendhal*). He was also responsible for the Club's *Physiognomy*, printed by Mallette Dean.



## Quarterly News-Letter

amples of *les livres de peintres*; and in general escaping from the banalities of modern living by feasting recklessly at the tables of the Old World. An arduous program for the time allowed—much work and little play; but we were committed irrevocably.

To attack our problems from a strategic position, we set up our base camp in a painter's studio-apartment on the Ile St. Louis, sequestered yet central, in the middle of the Seine. From this vantage point we set about our work. One of our earliest projects was a visit to Mme Claire Goll. She lives in an apartment on the Left Bank commanding a view of an historic convent—tranquility in the heart of a roaring city. The Goll library is extensive, with shelves in every room. Most are crowded with the published works of Yvan Goll, illustrated by his artist friends: Chagall, Mirò, Delaunay, Arp, Matisse, Picasso, Tanguy, Léger, and others. We immediately recognized one of the volumes, the Grubhorn Press edition of Goll's *Landless John*, published in 1944 and selected as one of the "Fifty Books of the Year." Mme Goll is justly pleased with it.

Following a lengthy discussion of the many facets of our project, she located the eight wood engravings with which Jean Arp illustrated one of the long poems. These beautiful, velvety blocks, used only in the limited French edition, are highly esteemed by Mme Goll: we departed with them after signing a receipt placing their value at 3,000,000 old francs (about \$8,000). Needless to say, we did not leave them in the taxi!

\* \* \*

In the evolution of our edition de luxe, the major problem concerned unification of the four poems (they vary greatly as to length of line and number of lines per page and stanza), and of the illustrations, which were achieved in four mediums (line drawings, lithographs, etchings, and wood engravings). To stabilize the verses and give definition to the type page, we have employed a series of four rather casual border decorations in color, each done in the style of the artist of that poem, by Mallette Dean. To standardize partially the varying size of illustrations, we have used tint blocks and other framing devices. Some sheets passed through the hand press as many as six times.

For the text type we selected Goudy Modern because of its strength and contemporary character; and for display lines,



## The Book Club of California

Cochin italic because of its grace and French ancestry. The entire book is hand-set, and the French Rives paper printed damp on our large Acorn-Smith hand press (ca. 1830). There are at least two colors on every page, and there are nine large hand-colored initials. As there are 200 folio pages, the volume is divided into five sections: the title page, contents, colophon and general introduction are in the first section, and each of the four poems is in a section to itself, in paper wrappers. The books are unsewn, in the French manner, but each section is tipped into its paper wrapper. The whole is housed in an elaborate and sturdy hinged box which is covered with natural linen and lined with blue suede.

The editor of our book, which is entitled *Four Poems of the Occult*, is Francis Carmody. In addition to sharing in the translation of Yvan Goll's work, he has contributed a general introduction and separate ones for each of the four poems. Publication date, we hope, will be in March of this year.





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